



TITLE:

PREFACE

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CITATION:

ICHIKAWA, Mitsuo. PREFACE. African study monographs.
Supplementary issue 1998, 25: 1-2

ISSUE DATE:

1998-03

URL:

<https://doi.org/10.14989/68395>

RIGHT:

PREFACE

This supplementary issue reports the results of recent anthropological field work on the hunting-and-gathering and horticultural societies of the tropical rain forest in central Africa.

The study of ecological anthropology in central Africa was started in the early 1970's by the researchers from Kyoto University. In 1971, after the political unrest subsided in the former Zairian state, Professor Junichiro Itani and the late Professor Reizo Harako visited the Ituri Forest of eastern Zaire. The primary purpose of this visit was to study the society of the hunter-gatherers in the tropical forest and to collect the data which could be used for reconstructing the evolutionary history of human societies. After a preliminary survey in the forest with Itani, Harako embarked on intensive study of the Mbuti hunter-gatherers. It was the first attempt to study the ecology and anthropology of the Mbuti and Efe hunters, which continued for the following twenty years.

While the research was focused on the diet, subsistence activities, and other ecological aspects in the initial stage, scientific interests have gradually extended to other aspects, including social organization, behavior, ethnoscience (ethnobotany and ethnozoology), religion and other spiritual aspects of life. The aim of research has also evolved from primarily evolutionary topics to the contemporary concerns relating to the economic, environmental and multi-ethnic issues of a much wider society.

Since the late 1980's, research has been conducted on the Aka hunter-gatherers in the Likouala and Sangha regions of the Republic of Congo. Many anthropologists shifted their research to northern Congo since 1991 when the political situation in the former Zaire considerably worsened and research became actually impossible. When the political unrest in Congo became grave in 1993, the study sites had to be again shifted further westward, to Cameroon, the westernmost limit in the distribution of hunter-gatherer societies in equatorial Africa. We embarked on the study of the Baka hunter-gatherer societies in eastern Cameroon, where the research has continued until now.

Thus, we have eventually studied all the three major central African hunter-gatherer societies in the Congo Basin, that is, the Mbuti and Efe in the east, the Aka in the north, and the Baka in the west. While the comparative viewpoint may not be clearly demonstrated in this volume, it will surely comprise the major concern in future studies. We have already obtained the basis for such a comparative study from the field research conducted during the last 25 years.

The research on the agricultural societies in the Congo basin also has a long history, starting from the mid-1970's. The major foci of this research were on slash-and-burn agriculture, hunting and gathering activities, diet and demography. Later, research was extended to the social aspects of non-verbal communication and interactive behavior, and also to the study of land use with the aid of satellite images. After 1991, the research on agricultural societies has been mainly carried out in northern Congo and Cameroon on similar topics.

The articles included in this volume are based on these long-term field studies. They were financially supported in part by the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Japan under the following titles: Anthropological Study of African Tropical Rain Forest (No.02041034: 1990-1991)

organized by Hideaki Terashima, A Study on the Sustainable Use of African Rain Forest (No.04041062: 1992-1994) and Anthropology of Post-Foraging Societies (No.09044027: 1997) organized by Mitsuo Ichikawa, and A Study on the Carrying Capacity of African Rain Forest (No. 06041046: 1994-1996) organized by Hiroaki Sato.

Also, these studies were made possible by the kind assistance of the following institutions and persons, to whom we owe special thanks: Centre de Recherche en Sciences Naturelles of the former Republic of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and Dr. Zana Ndontoni, the Director of CRSN; Département de la Recherche Scientifique and Dr. Dinga-Reassi, the Director of the Division of Cooperation, and the Centre des Etudes sur les Ressources Végétales and Dr. Jean-Marie Moutsambote, of the Republic of Congo; the Ministère de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique and Dr. Jean B. Nyobe of the Division of Planification and Dr. Binam Bikoi of the Division of Cooperation, of the Republic of Cameroon.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks to many friends among the Mbuti, Efe, and Bongando peoples in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Aka, Baka and Bobanda peoples in the Republic of Congo, and the Baka and Kaka peoples in the Republic of Cameroon, for their warm cooperation, generosity and patience.

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